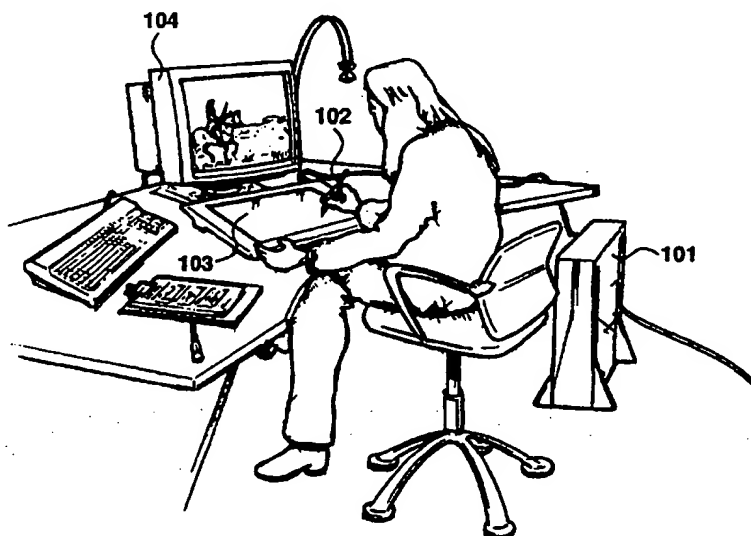




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(54) Title: PROCESSING IMAGE DATA



(57) Abstract

An object shown in a first clip of image frames is composited with frames of a second clip on a frame-by-frame basis. A track of positions are determined over time which specify a relationship between a point on frames from said first clip in relation to corresponding frames in said second clip. The object is overlaid transparently over corresponding frames of second clip and the positions of said track are modified. Thereafter, the images are composited on the basis of the modified track positions.

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PROCESSING IMAGE DATA

Technical Field

5 The present application relates to processing image data, wherein an object from shown in a first clip of image frames is compsite with the frames of a second clip on a frame by frame basis.

Background

10 Advances in the field of digital signal processing have allowed many new developments to be effected in video and film post production. Many sophisticated image modifications and special effects have become widely accepted as part of post production procedures as a result of the developments such products as "FLAME", "FLINT RT" and "FIRE", licensed by the present Assignee.

15 A "clip" of film or video consists of a plurality of image frames which are displayed at frame rate to create the illusion of a moving image. The process of removing an object from a first clip and adding it to a second clip, to create the illusion that the object was always present in the second clip, is generally referred to as compositing.

20 Many compositing procedures were developed using highly labour-intensive procedures. Consequently, their application has been limited and, recently, a demand has developed for reducing the amount of labour required in order to achieve these effects, so as to make them more widely available.

25 When objects are moving within a scene, it is often necessary for an added object to exhibit some movement so as to maintain the illusion. A known process for achieving this is to perform a tracking operation upon a selected position within the background image. The tracking information is then used to effect movement of an added object over time, on a frame by frame basis. This approach has many useful applications but problems occur
30 if, for some reason, it is not possible to maintain a track. This occurs, for example, if a tracked location becomes obscured by another object or if the track location extends beyond the image frame.

CONFIRMATION COPY

A display control system is disclosed in United States Patent No. 4908700 in which a moving image of an object is successively compounded with a color picture image from an external source, so as to obtain a compounded image in which the resulting image of the object appears to be moving with respect to the color picture image. A display control apparatus includes a register unit for color range selecting data and circuitry for selecting one of first color image data corresponding to signals which are supplied from an external device such as a television camera and second color image data read from video memory. The value of color image data selected by the selection circuit is compared with a value of the color range selecting data stored in the register unit and based on this comparison either the first color image or second color image data is selected. This allows a first moving image to be inserted within a moving scene but the inter-relation between the two image portions is determined exclusively by the automatic selection made by the system, which, particularly at high definitions, may not always be appropriate.

Summary of The Invention

According to a first aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of processing image data, wherein an object shown in a first clip of image frames is composited with frames of a second clip on a frame by frame basis, comprising steps of determining a track of positions over time which specify a relationship between a point on frames from said first clip in relation to corresponding frames in said second clip; overlaying said object transparently over corresponding frames of said second clip; modifying the positions of said track; and compositing said images on the basis of said modified track positions.

The invention provides an advantage in that it is possible to make manual modifications to a tracked object. While modifications are being made, the objects to be added is overlaid but the overlaying process renders the object transparent, such that the underlying background can also be viewed. In this way, it is possible to make manual modifications to the track such that, during the final compositing procedure, the added object is

positioned as required and thereby maintain the illusion in the output composited clip.

Preferably, tracked positions are determined by making pixel comparisons between adjacent frames. Preferably, an object is overlaid
5 transparently by adjusting blending values.

According to a second aspect of the present invention, there is provided image processing apparatus, configured to display an object from a first clip of image frames composited with frames of a second clip, comprising determining means configured to determine a track of positions over time
10 which specify a relationship between a point on frames from said first clip in relation to corresponding frames in second clip; overlaying means configured to overlay said object transparently over corresponding frames of said second clip; modifying means configured to modify the positions of said track and compositing means configured to composite said images on the basis of
15 said modified track positions.

Preferably, said modifying means includes means to allow modification by manual operation.

Brief Description of The Drawings

20 Figure 1 illustrates a post production facility, including a storage device for video clips, a processing device and a display device for displaying images;

Figure 2 illustrates an image of the type displayed on the display device shown in Figure 1, including an undesirable object to be tracked for
25 application of an obscuring object;

Figure 3 illustrates the object of Figure 2 along with a transparent obscuring object;

Figure 4 shows the position of a transparent obscuring object after manual modification;

30 Figure 5 shows a modified object after manually being modified, after the removal of transparency;

Figure 6 illustrates a portion of an image processed for tracking purposes;

Figure 7 shows a tracking process performed by the processing device shown in Figure 1; and

Figure 8 shows how modifications are made to a track using a transparent foreground object.

5

Detailed Description of a Preferred Embodiment

A post production facility is shown in Figure 1, in which video clips are processed in a processing device 101. The processing of image clips is controlled in response to manual operation of a stylus 102 against a graphics touch tablet 103. Image clips are displayed to a video artist via a display unit 104.

In the present example, image data has been supplied to the processing device 201, by scanning cinematographic film, such that said images may now be manipulated as digital image data. A desert scene is shown and the video artist is required to modify frames within the clip so as to obscure an offending object.

The frame shown in Figure 2 represents a typical frame within a clip to be modified. The frame includes a background object 201 which should not be present in the scene. The object moves relative to the edge of the frame 202 and the artist has decided to apply a tracking process so as to track a specific portion 203 of the object 201 as it moves relative to the frame boundary 202. This is achieved by selecting an appropriate menu button and placing a cursor 203 over the selected location. The foreground object is then applied to the scene and blended against the background at a position which will obscure the offending object 201 on a frame by frame basis. The foreground object has a specified location therein which is configured to follow the track defined by the selected object 203. After applying this track, it may be found that, over a particular region, less than favourable results are obtained. This situation is illustrated in Figure 3.

A foreground object in the form of a cloud 301 has been made available so as to be in a position to be composited with the background image. Presently, the foreground image and the background image are held in separate storage locations and blending is being performed in real-time

such that the two components to the composite image are independently available. Blending between the foreground and background is achieved using control signals often referred to as alpha information. Normally, in most regions, this alpha information is set to its maximum extent or to its minimum extent, with intermediate values only being specified around boundary edges, so as to provide soft blending between components. However, it is possible to modify these alpha values for the image as a whole, so as to show it as having a level of transparency. In this way, it is possible to locate a foreground image relative to a background image, with said background image being seen as transparent behind said foreground image.

This process is effected with respect to Figure 3 and as shown in Figure 3 the new foreground object 301 and the offending background object 201 are now displayed at reduced transparency. It is now possible for the foreground object to be selected and manually moved relative to the object frame. This situation is illustrated in Figure 4. The foreground object 301 is now located, manually, to a position where it totally covers the offending background object 201. Furthermore, it is possible for a particular location within the foreground object to be accurately lined up against a corresponding selected location within the background object. This represents the condition which should have been achieved by the tracking operation but, for whatever reason, failed in the automated routine. Thus, having manually adjusted the position of the track locations, the track itself may be modified so as to bring the whole locus of track points into line with their idealized locations.

After the foreground object has been moved relative to the background object in its transparent mode, the tracking procedure may be implemented again, resulting in a non-transparent foreground object fully occluding an offending background object as shown in Figure 5. Thus, the foreground object added to Figure 5 will now carefully track the offending background object so as to ensure that said background object remains occluded for the entirety of the clip.

The tracking operation is effected by identifying a particular region within the image frame. Figure 6 shows an enlarged portion within the region

to be tracked. In response to making an appropriate selection from a displayed menu, a tracking box 601 is displayed which is located, in response to operation of the stylus 202, over a position within the image where a distinct transition occurs. This is identified in Figure 6 by image 602 located
5 within box 601.

On initiating the tracking procedure, values within box 301 are retained in memory such that on the next frame, comparisons can be made to determine how image 602 has moved within the frame. Box 601 in this example consists of an array of 8 x 8 pixels and is considered as being
10 centrally located within a search area of 16 x 16 pixels 603. Thus, the first pixel of box 601 may be identified as 604 and the first pixel of box 603 may be identified as 605.

After storing pixel data for the first frame, consisting of box 601, box 601 of the first frame is compared against box 603 of the next frame. Pixel
15 position 604 is compared with pixel position 605 and for each pixel location within box 601 a comparison is made between equivalent pixel locations. Thus, the value of pixel 604 will be compared with the value of pixel 605. Similarly, all other equivalent pixels within the 8 x 8 box will be compared with their equivalent locations within box 603.

20 Once these comparison values have been calculated, box 601 is advanced one pixel position to the left. A similar comparison is then made resulting in a further 8 x 8 pixel difference values being calculated. The procedure is then repeated, with a further movement to the left and so on until box 601 has been located at all possible positions within box 603 and
25 comparison values have been calculated for all corresponding pixel locations.

The comparison values for each possible location of box 601 within region 603 are compared and as a result of this comparison it is possible to determine a best match for box 601 of the first frame with all possible positions within box 603 of the second frame. The best possible match is
30 then assumed to be a result of object 602 moving within the frame and from this information it is possible to deduce a movement vector.

A movement vector is stored and the procedure is repeated for the next frame within the clip. Thus, as a result of the movement vector

calculated when comparing box 601 with region 603, it is possible to relocate box 601 within the second frame of the clip. This re-positioned box 601 is then considered against a similar surrounding region 603 of the third frame. Here it should be noted that box 601 and region 603 are both relocated in response to the movement vector from the previous comparison. Thus, for each frame transition it is possible to calculate a movement vector so as to effectively track image 602 throughout the entire clip.

Processes performed by processing device 101, in order to generate a track, are illustrated in Figure 7. At step 701 the next frame of a clip is loaded, ie the first frame on the first iteration, and at step 702 a search block is identified.

At step 703 the inner block, block 602 in Figure 6, is moved to the next position in the outer block 603.

At step 704 pixel values within the inner block are compared against the corresponding pixel values in the outer block. Thereafter, at step 705 match factors are produced for each pixel within the inner block and at step 706 a question is asked as to whether another position within the outer block needs to be considered.

When the question asked at step 706 is answered in the affirmative, control is returned to step 703, resulting in further movement of the inner block to the next position in the outer block. Again comparisons are made of pixel values within the inner block to produce a new match factor for the newly located inner block.

Eventually, all positions will have been considered, resulting in the question asked at step 706 being answered in the negative. Thereafter, at step 707 the best match factor of all the factors calculated at step 705 is selected, thereby generating a movement vector for the adjacent frames. Thereafter, at step 708 a question is asked as to whether another frame is present in the clip and when answered in the affirmative control is returned to step 701.

The process shown in Figure 7 allows track positions to be determined over time which specify a relationship between a point on frames from the first clip in relation to corresponding frames in the second clip. An object from

the first clip may now be overlaid over the second clip in a way which allows it to track movements in the underlying clip on a frame-by-frame basis. However, in order to make manual adjustments to the track, the object is overlaid transparently over corresponding frames of the second clip.

5 Consequently, modifications may be made to positions within the track, whereafter image composition may be effected using the modified track positions.

System requirements for providing transparent overlaying of objects are illustrated in Figure 8. Foreground image data may be considered as being retained within a frame store 801. Typically, this frame store will include storage locations to allow the pixel data to be stored as red, green and blue colour components. Similarly, background image data may be stored in a similar frame store 802 and a composite image, supplied to an output frame store 803, may be generated by selecting pixel values from the foreground image data store 801 or from the background image data store 802.

Typically, eight bytes are allocated to each of the red, green and blue colour components and in many systems an additional control plane of eight bytes is provided, thereby allocating a total of 32 bits to each stored location. These additional eight bytes are often identified by differing names, depending upon their particular application. The eight byte control signals are often referred to as an alpha channel and may be considered as providing a further eight bytes of storage, as illustrated by an alpha store 804 for the image data 801, with a similar alpha store 805 for the background image data 802.

25 The alpha data is used to make a selection between the foreground image and the background image. Alpha data may be selected from store 804 or from store 805, in response to operations of a selector 806. Often, alpha data will be generated from the foreground image so, as shown in Figure 3, a key or alpha signal is generated to effect blending of a foreground object 301 against the background frame.

30 In normal compositing procedures, most of the alpha signal will be set to its minimum extent or to its maximum extent, with intermediate values being provided at object edges, so as to provide smooth blending at said

edges. If the alpha channel is placed to intermediate values at other locations, blending of foreground and background image results, creating the impression of the foreground image being transparent.

In the present invention, when this transparent mode of operation is
5 required, alpha values in foreground store 804 are modified such that, instead of providing selection between a foreground object or a background, the foreground object is blended with the background throughout its full extent.

The background image store is scanned from top left to bottom right
10 so as to provide a conventional image frame. The foreground image store may be scanned at identical positions synchronously with the background image store, such that the position of objects within the frame remains as originally intended. However, it is possible to offset the scanning of the foreground image data relative to the background image data. Modification of
15 this offset results in a foreground object appearing to move relatively within the background frame. Thus, by modifying alpha values within the foreground data and by adjusting the relative phase of scanning between the foreground data and the background data, it is possible to move a transparent foreground object relatively to the background.

20 The tracking points may be displayed on an image screen, in addition to the foreground and background images and with said images placed in a transparent mode, it is possible to make modifications to these tracking locations. Thus, a track created by automatic processing as illustrated with reference to Figure 7, may be adjusted manually, so as to achieve a better
25 result without requiring the whole clip to be manually adjusted.

A conventional alpha channel or key signal is illustrated in Figure 9A in which said signal may have a value ranging from zero to 100%. At 100%, such as at region 901, a foreground object totally obscures background data. Similarly, at regions 902 and 903, where the signal is set at 0%, the
30 foreground object is not seen at all and only the background is seen. Between these two extremes, over regions 904 and 905, a blending occurs and at position 906, the alpha signal is at 50% therefore the blending between the foreground and the background is substantially equal.

In order to render the foreground object transparent, as required by the present embodiment, the alpha signal is modified as illustrated in Figure 9B. The alpha signal is effectively clipped such that all values above 50% in Figure 9A are set to 50%, as illustrated at 907. Thus, regions where the alpha signal is set to zero, background regions, remain substantially the same and at the intersection of foreground and background regions smooth blending occurs via slopes 908 and 909. However, the alpha signal never reaches 100% and is clipped as illustrated at 907. Consequently, all of the foreground object is partially blended with the background object such that the foreground object appears substantially transparent.

In order to effect the required level of tracking, it is possible to move the foreground object along with its associated alpha channel. A movement of this type may take place as illustrated by arrow 910 to produce a displaced key signal as illustrated in Figure 9C. Thus, horizontal movement of the object results in the key signal being substantially displaced along a scan line of the video signal. Similarly, vertical movement may result in the exchanging of scan lines. Furthermore, by providing suitable two-dimensional filtering, it is possible to effect movements at sub-pixel definition, all of which results in modifications to alpha signals reflecting similar movements to the displayed objects.

A track may be displayed on a visual display monitor 104 as illustrated in Figure 10. An automated tracking procedure may result in the generation of a plurality of tracking points illustrated by crosses 1001. However, it is possible that this track does not provide optimum results and, by effecting the procedures of the present invention, it is possible to modify the tracking points to positions identified by dots 1002. This new track is then adopted as the tracking line, resulting in the desired effect being realised as the introduced foreground object tracks a background object within the video clip.

Claims

1. A method of processing image data, wherein an object shown in a first clip of image frames is composited with frames of a second clip on a frame by frame basis, comprising steps of
 - 5 determining a track of positions over time which specify a relationship between a point on frames from said first clip in relation to corresponding frames in said second clip;
 - 10 overlaying said object transparently over corresponding frames of said second clip;
 - modifying the positions of said track; and
 - compositing said images on the basis of said modified track positions.
2. A method of processing image data according to claim 1,
 - 15 wherein tracked positions are determined by making pixel comparisons between adjacent frames.
3. A method according to claim 1, wherein an object is overlaid transparently by adjusting blending values.
 - 20
4. A method according to claim 1, wherein the positions of said track are modified by manual operation.
5. Image processing apparatus, configured to display an object from a first clip of image frames composited with frames of a second clip, comprising
 - 25 determining means configured to determine a track of positions over time which specify a relationship between a point on frames from said first clip in relation to corresponding frames in a second clip;
 - 30 overlaying means configured to overlay said object transparently over corresponding frames of said second clip;
 - modifying means configured to modify the positions of said track; and

compositing means configured to composite said images on the basis of said modified track positions.

6. Apparatus according to claim 5, wherein said determining
5 means is configured to make pixel comparisons between adjacent frames.

7. Apparatus according to claim 5, wherein said overlaying means
is configured to overlay an object transparently by adjusting blending values.

8. Apparatus according to claim 5, wherein said modifying means
10 is configured to facilitate modification of track positions by manual operation.

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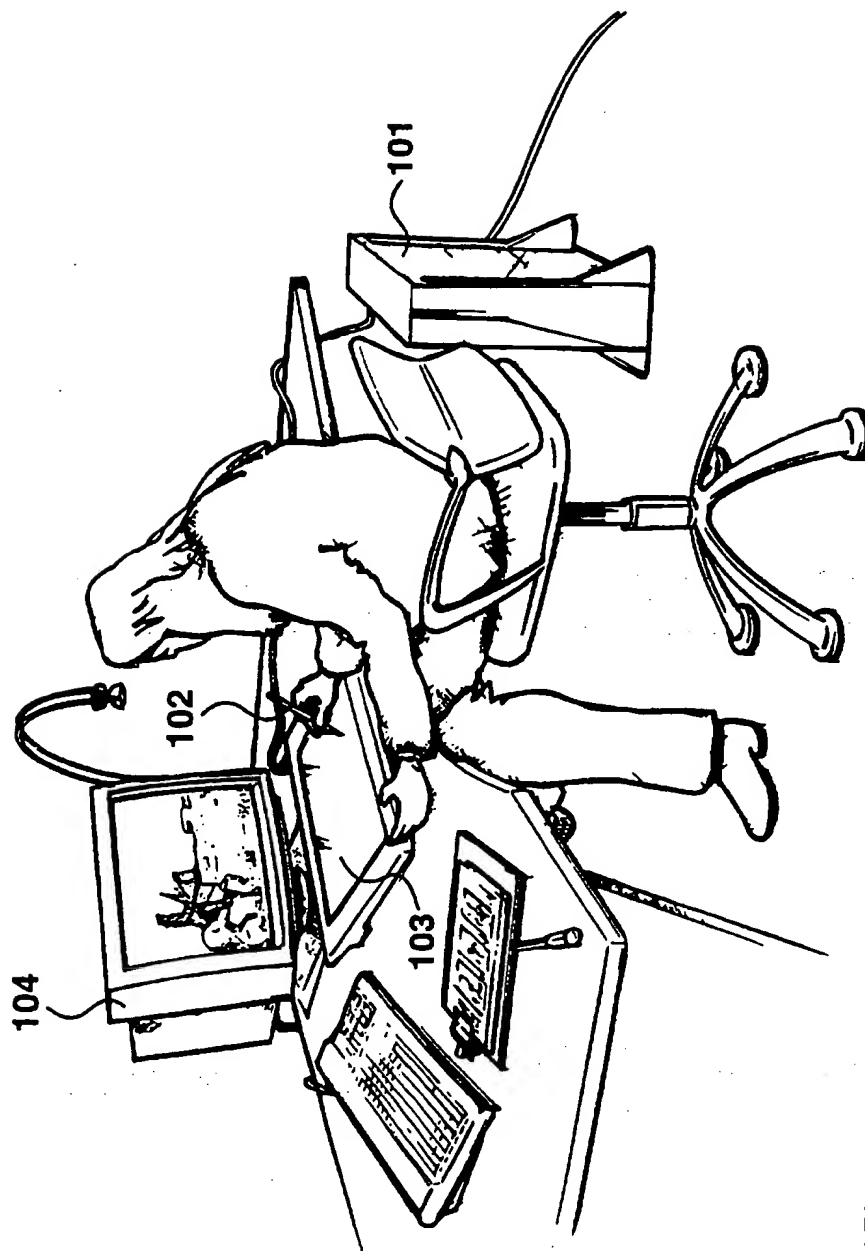


Figure 1

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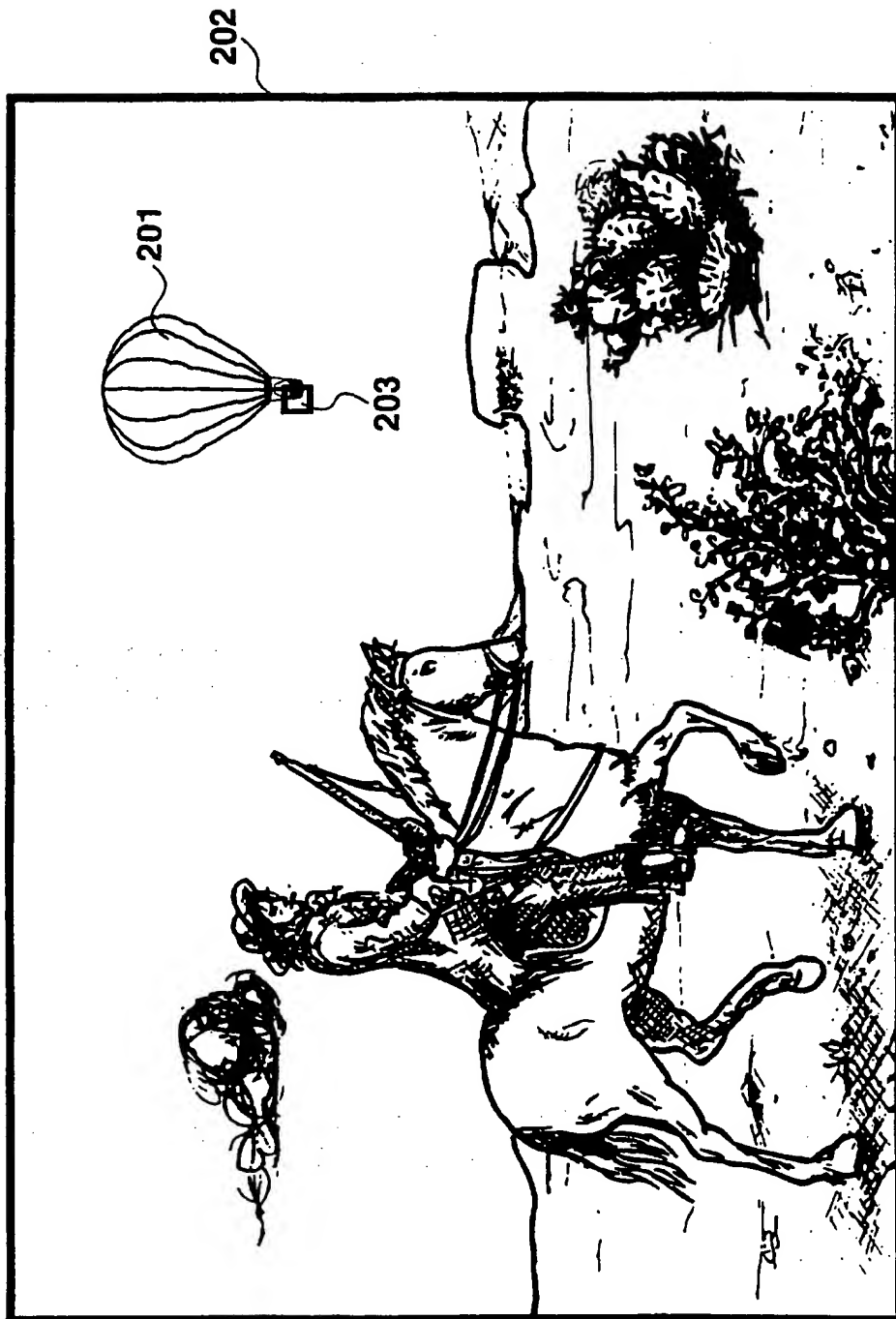


Figure 2

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Figure 3

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Figure 4

5/10



Figure 5

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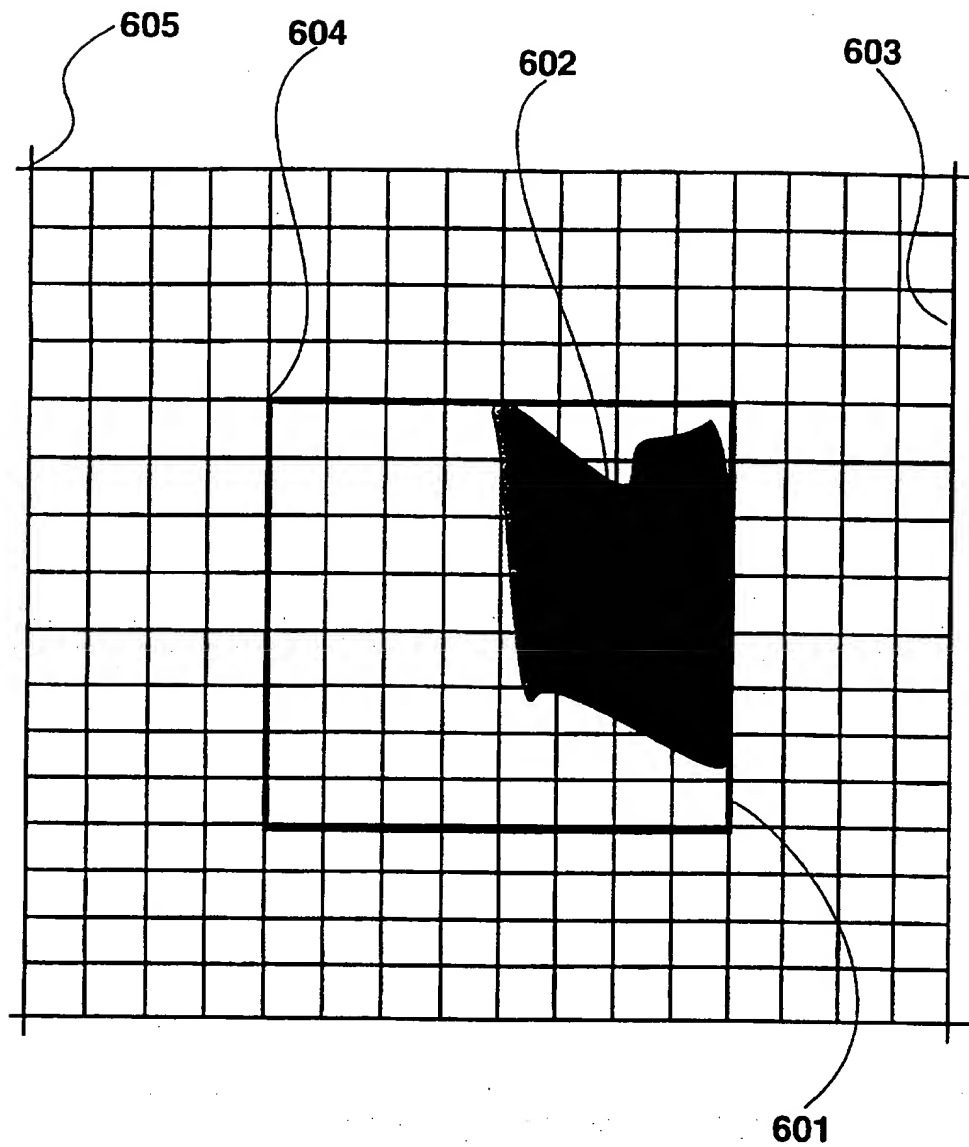


Figure 6

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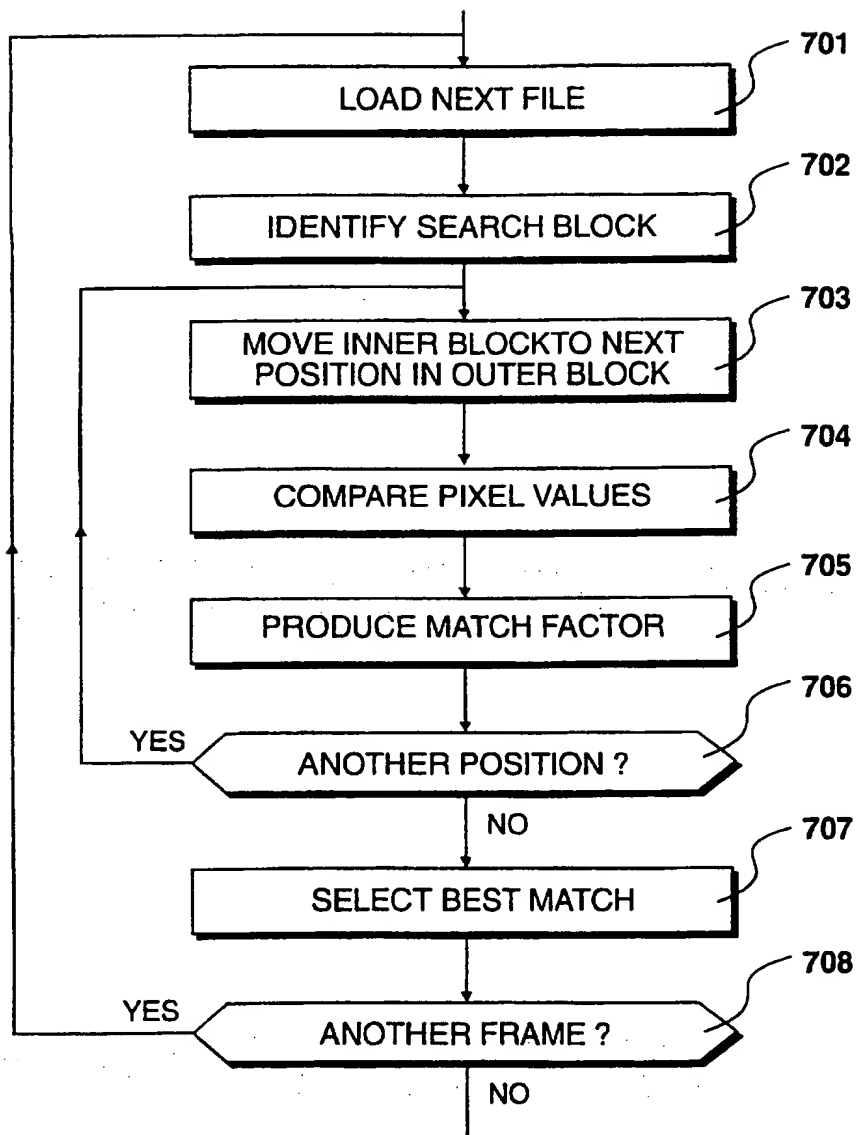


Figure 7

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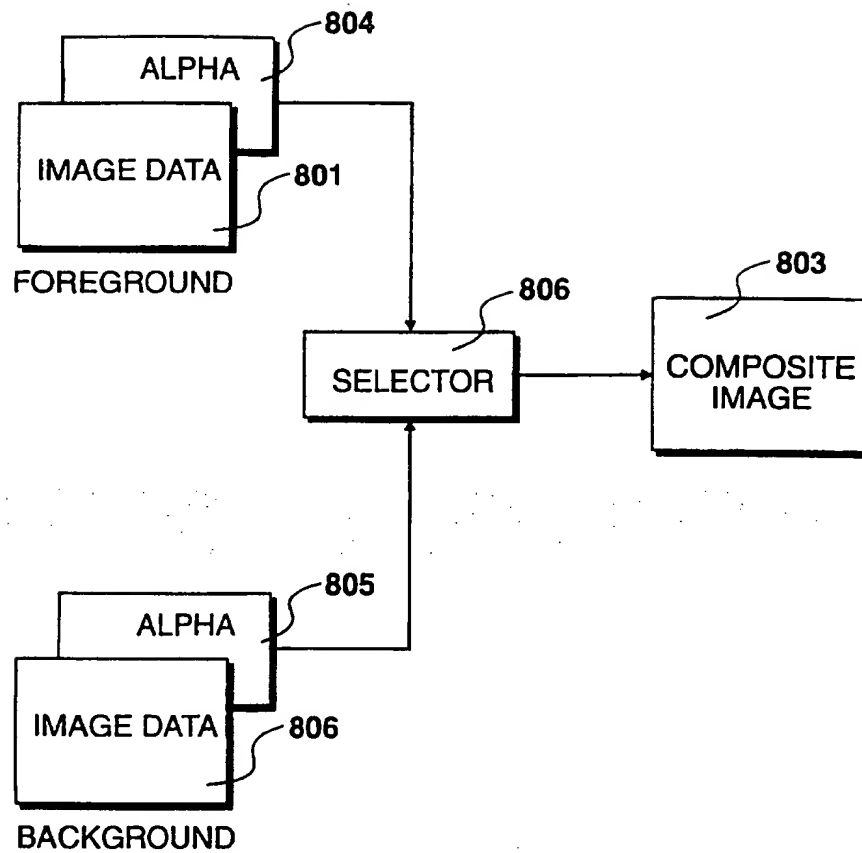


Figure 8

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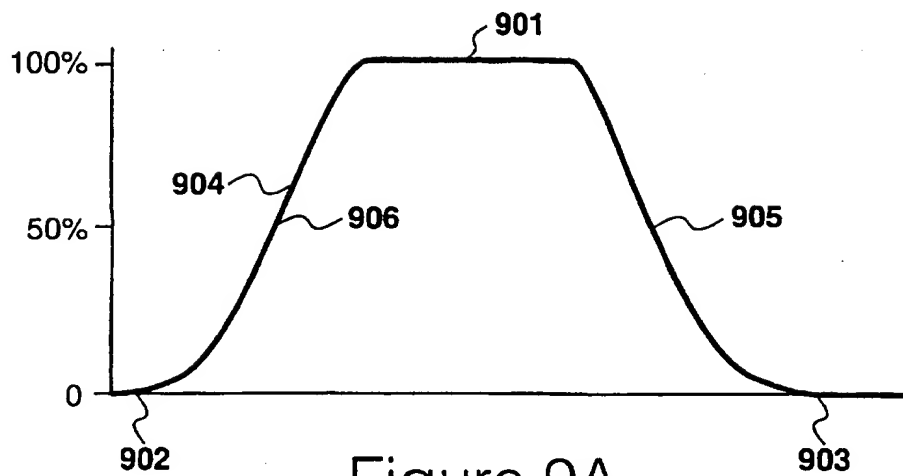


Figure 9A

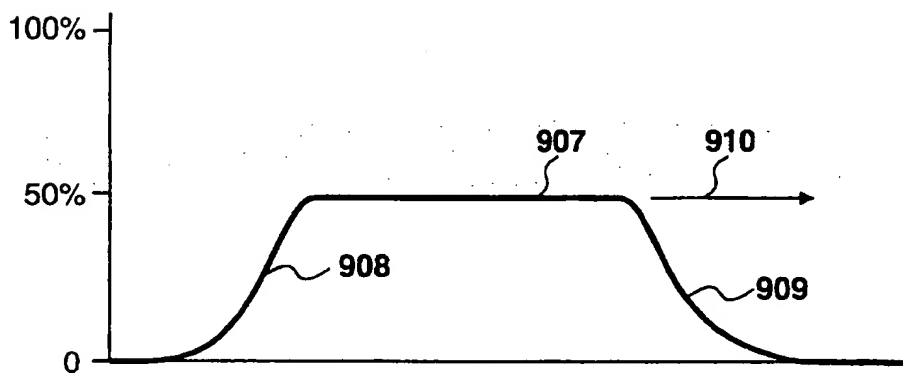


Figure 9B

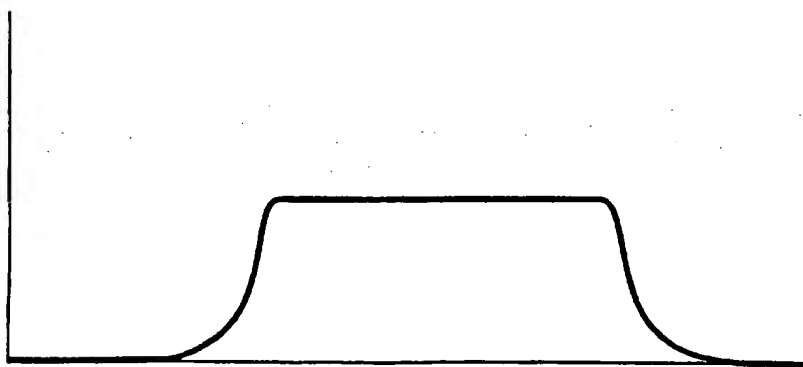


Figure 9C

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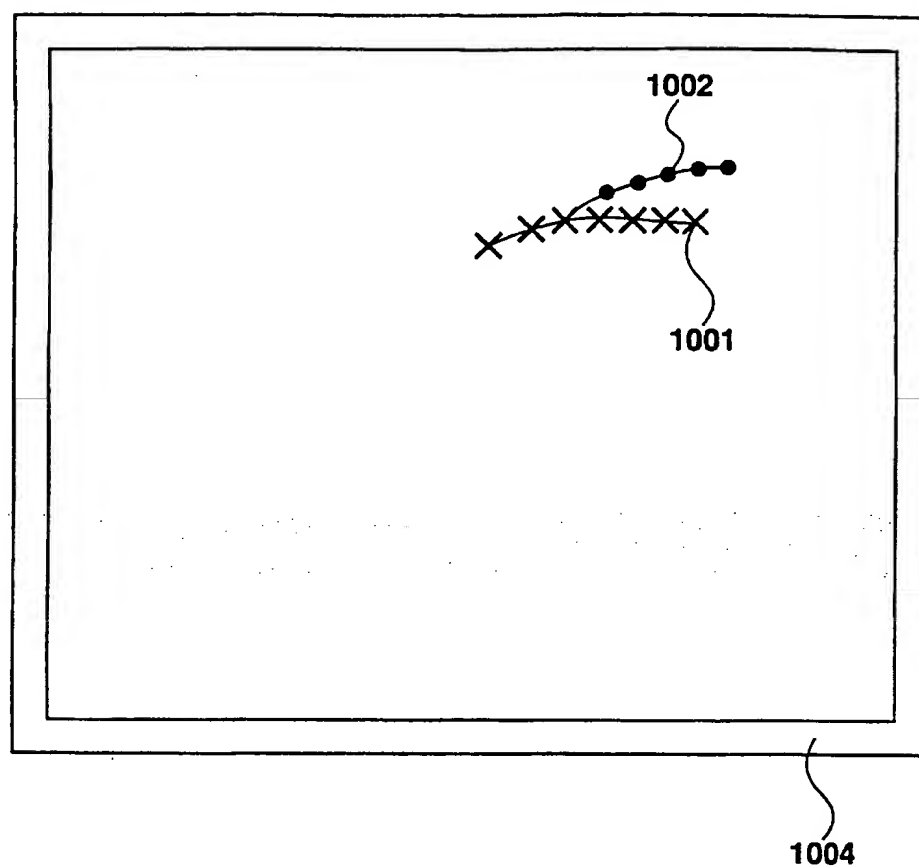


Figure 10

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No
PCT/IB 97/01082

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 6 G06T15/70

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
IPC 6 G06T

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	EP 0 360 576 A (QUANTEL LTD) 28 March 1990 see column 2, line 37 - column 3, line 5 see column 3, line 36 - line 50 see column 5, line 5 - line 38 see column 7, line 5 - line 24 ---	1-8
A	WO 96 07979 A (WELCH ANDREW) 14 March 1996 see page 1, line 1 - line 9 see page 2, line 6 - line 13 see page 11, line 14 - line 22 ---	1-8
A	EP 0 589 658 A (MATSUSHITA ELECTRIC IND CO LTD) 30 March 1994 see column 9, line 27 - line 34 see column 10, line 8 - line 57 see column 11, line 16 - line 37; figures 12,16 -----	1-8

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

5 December 1997

Date of making of the international search report

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